

PLAGIARISM AMONG STUDENTS: HOW TO BUILD HONESTY IN RESEARCH WRITING

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In the academic setting, research writing serves as one of the most important platforms for students to demonstrate critical thinking, creativity, and communication skills. Yet, one persistent issue continues to challenge teachers across all grade levels: plagiarism. Whether intentional or accidental, plagiarism undermines the very purpose of education. For English teachers in particular, it raises questions not only about language proficiency but also about integrity and the values that schools aim to instill in learners.

In many Philippine classrooms, students often struggle to distinguish between paraphrasing, quoting, and copying. Some learners think that rearranging a few words from a source makes the work original, while others assume that copying from the internet is acceptable as long as the information is “common knowledge.” A local study by Reyes and Domingo (2022) revealed that senior high school students in Metro Manila frequently engaged in what the researchers called “unconscious plagiarism.” According to the study, lack of proper instruction in citation and insufficient exposure to research writing caused students to unknowingly commit academic dishonesty.

This issue is not unique to the Philippines. International research highlights a similar trend. According to a global survey by Bretag et al. (2019), more than 15% of university students admitted to submitting plagiarized work at least once, while many more confessed to practices categorized as “contract cheating,” such as hiring others to complete assignments. These statistics reveal that plagiarism is not merely a local classroom concern but a global educational challenge

intensified by easy access to online resources. The rise of digital tools, including artificial intelligence writing assistants, has further complicated this issue, blurring the lines between assistance and dishonesty.

Building honesty in research writing requires a holistic approach that combines skills instruction, ethical formation, and supportive mentorship. At the skills level, students must be explicitly taught how to paraphrase, summarize, and cite sources properly. While some teachers assume that learners already know these techniques, classroom experiences suggest otherwise. Step-by-step modeling—such as rewriting a passage together, identifying keywords, and citing correctly—helps students develop confidence in using sources ethically. Practical exercises, such as comparing a plagiarized passage with a properly paraphrased one, can also raise awareness of academic integrity.

Equally important is the formation of values. Research writing is not just about meeting requirements; it is about respecting the work of others while contributing original ideas. Teachers can emphasize that plagiarism, even when accidental, erodes trust in academic communities. In the Philippine context, where collectivist values are strong, framing honesty as a contribution to the group's credibility resonates with students. When learners see integrity as a shared responsibility, they are more likely to commit to ethical research practices.

Mentorship also plays a crucial role. Students who fear failure or who lack confidence in their writing may resort to plagiarism as a shortcut. Teachers who provide constructive feedback, encourage revision, and celebrate progress help reduce this anxiety. For instance, a learner who initially copies large portions of text may improve if guided patiently on how to express ideas in his or her own words. In this sense, preventing plagiarism is not merely about punishment but about empowerment.

Finally, schools must create environments where honesty is valued and supported. Implementing plagiarism checkers can be helpful, but these should be used as teaching tools rather than punitive traps. Workshops, peer review sessions, and writing clinics also provide opportunities for students to practice integrity in research writing. In my own experience, when learners are given safe spaces to make mistakes and improve, they develop both the skills and the character necessary for honest scholarship.

Plagiarism will remain a challenge as long as students face the pressures of academic performance in a digital age. However, through a combination of clear instruction, ethical guidance, and supportive mentorship, teachers can help learners understand that originality is not about perfection but about honesty. By building this foundation, schools prepare students not only to succeed academically but also to become responsible and trustworthy members of society.

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